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Marriages and Certificates in England & Wales

Barbara Dixon

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Barbara Dixon

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been prepared to try and help family historians first find and then make the most of the information provided by marriage certificates. It only relates to certificates issued by the registration service in England and Wales (Scotland, Northern Ireland, Southern Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands all have their own registration services which may differ significantly from the details discussed in this booklet).

HISTORY OF MARRIAGE REGISTRATION

Introduction

To understand some of the many complexities of marriage in this country it is necessary to understand some of the historical background. The history of marriage basically falls into three periods:

- 1 Pre 1754
- 2 1754-1837
- 3 Post 1837

Pre 1754

The first uniform attempts to record marriages date from 1538 following the dissolution of the monasteries. Before then marriages were recorded by the monks, and there may have been careful recording by some but the whole system was inconsistent and not centrally organised.

In 1538 Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor, required clergy to keep records of every baptism, marriage and burial. A further Act in 1597 required the use of bound registers (not individual bits of parchment) and also required a duplicate copy to be sent to the diocesan registrar – which you will be familiar with as the Bishop's Transcripts. (Over 400 years later, a duplicate copy of all registrations of births, deaths and marriages – and stillbirths – is still made every quarter and sent to the Office of National Statistics.)

The second copy served several useful purposes, and still does. It is an insurance against fraudulent alteration of the original register. In the case of dispute the copy (certified to be an exact copy of the register) can be compared with the original. It also insures against accidental loss of the original through fire, damp, rats, theft etc. In the last war, all the copies of the registers were stored in caves in South Wales as an insurance against loss of original registers in registry offices through enemy action. The centralisation of all the records of an extensive area also makes it much easier for searches for a specific entry to be made.

Think of the effort that would be involved if there were no indexes and you had to trail to all the individual offices to look for the one entry you wanted – it doesn't bear thinking about! The experience of researching in other

Novembre 1710

4 Isaac Merrill - laborer & Edmund Robinson (spinster) both of the parish - B.

20. ²⁰⁰Canoeboat ^{Springer}Byrdop & Jones Rushforth of Skipton ————— 5.

February 1915

22 Henry Bottomon of Faken in Kitchin - parish (farmer) & Eliz. Butler of the same Spinkers.

May - 1919

26. Sho. Whitcomb (Weaver) & Mary Abigail Jefferies of Skipton 3.

September 1710

15. Thomas Howard (Labour) & Elizabeth (Granddaughter of the parish - B.

19. Paul Moor of Amherst parish (Yorke) & Jane Nelson of Longpittton
- parish - Rotherham

19. And Michaelson is known as Margt. Hornor of Kirby Muxton parish - 91 - 12

01. Anthony Word & Mary Gild^{SP-16} of this parish — — — 2

Skipton Marriage Registers pre 1754

These records are slightly better than many of the time, as they are consistent in giving the marital status of the bride and the occupation of the groom and the parish of origin. However, it is not possible to tell the marital status of the groom and there are no details of the father of either party. Lancelot Bishop was nearly 40 so may have been married before. Lancelot's name has been spelt as Lanceleot this time. He appeared eight times in the Skipton Registers of baptisms, marriages and burials and every time his name was spelt differently. You must be very flexible about names and their spelling right up to the present. The entry two below the one for Lancelot is for a Thomas Whitacre – but could easily be mistranscribed as Thomas Whitehouse. The one between Lancelot and Thomas is for an Elizabeth Nutter – Nutter being a local name but again one that could well appear in an index as Rutter or Hutter. Indexes are wonderful but it is always necessary to check the originals. Mistranscribing is not only common on the older registers – those of the GRO can also be wrong (see page 15). Reproduced by kind permission of North Yorkshire County Record Office.

countries shows the usefulness of the centralised duplicate copies. In Ireland the loss of the centralised registers in the fire of 1921 means that the only records now held are with the individual churches. In France, each birth registration is kept in the town hall, so if you don't know in which area to search the task becomes almost impossible. On the other hand, French records do show all the life events on the one record so once you have found the record you want, you also get dates of marriage and death or divorce.

There were no separate or printed marriage books. The event was recorded along with baptisms and burials, sometimes separately at the back of the book but not always. The information was sparse in the extreme – often no more than the name of the groom and the name of the bride with the date of the event. There were not necessarily any details of age, occupation, address or even the marital status of the parties, let alone any information about the fathers of the couple (see page 2).

The keeping of the marriage registers (and those of births and deaths) continued to be a source of concern and the Commonwealth period in the 17th century saw the introduction of civil registrars in 1653. The conditions for civil marriage were remarkably similar to those in force today – publication of a notice of marriage so that objections could be made, public celebration of the marriage so there was no doubt that it had taken place and who the parties marrying were, the opportunity for the registrar to confirm the details, and the keeping of registers.

Alas, the end of the Commonwealth saw the return of marriage into the hands of the clergy (and the destruction of most of the Commonwealth registers). It also saw the return of concern over the loss of registers and the existence – especially in London – of irregular and clandestine marriages of which the notorious Fleet marriages were one example.

The remedy was sought in Hardwicke's Marriage Act.

1754–1837

Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 sought to have marriages made a public matter – open for everyone to know about so that, for example, bigamous or incestuous marriages might be stopped. The preliminary arrangements (banns or licences) and the recording of the marriages, were to be kept in bound and numbered books. Minimum ages and the need for parental consent for young people were established, as was the requirement for people to establish residency in a parish before marriage. The Act did away with child marriages, instant marriages, marriage by proxy and marriage under duress, at least in theory.

Marriage was also made a public affair in that the ceremony could not take place behind locked doors. Whilst I wouldn't try to make a habit of gate-crashing too many weddings, in theory anyone may attend any marriage.

And lastly, all marriages with the exception of those of Quakers and Jews, had to take place in the established parish church or chapel licensed by a bishop of the established church. Non-conformists' marriages in non-conformist churches or meeting places were not legal. Finding your ancestors' marriages in the parish registers but not their baptisms or burials could therefore be an indication of non-conformity.

Thus from 1754 to 1837 there were three possible types of marriage:

- 1 In the established church (Church of England in England, the Church in Wales in Wales).
- 2 By Jewish ceremony.
- 3 By Quaker ceremony.

Marriage in the established church

All the legal preliminaries were made by the church and the marriage was solemnised in a church or chapel.

Marriage by banns meant that a couple had to be resident in the parish for one week before the banns could be read, banns had to be written into a banns notice book and were either called in the church or proclaimed in a public place such as a market for three successive weeks. Banns had to be called within the three months before the date of the marriage. If the bride and groom lived in different parishes then the banns had to be called in both

parishes. The total process thus took about one month from the start of residency to the completion of banns when the marriage could take place. Notice that the couple (or individual) only had to be resident for that one week – it was not necessary to be resident for the whole month. A huge number of couples used this loophole to have a marriage in a place other than the one in which they truly lived, and they married in other places for a variety of reasons e.g. wanting to be married in a particularly pretty church, or wanting to return to their parents' area.

The minimum ages of marriage were set at 12 for a girl and 14 for a boy and parental consent had to be obtained for parties under the age of 21 (see page 25 for further details on ages).

The marriage had to be witnessed by two people and written into a marriage register specific to that church, signed by both the parties, their witnesses and the minister performing the ceremony. There *were* specific pre-printed registers for recording marriages, but they were not – at least in the beginning – a legal requirement. The only requirement was that the marriages should be recorded separately in a bound book (see page 6).

Couples could be married by common licence if they wished to marry more quickly than the three weeks required by banns, or if they did not wish to have the banns publicly called. The couple applied to the diocesan registrar for a common licence and once obtained they could be married forthwith in the church or chapel named in the licence. As the couple had to apply to the diocesan registrar, this was a matter for the Bishop. Many ordinary couples were forced to marry by licence due to church rules. The only day that was free for many people to marry was Sunday – but marriage on a Sunday had to be by licence. It is probably worth looking at the date of marriage and a perpetual calendar to work out on which day of the week your ancestors were marrying.

Marriage on Christmas Day was also popular for the same reason – that working people had a holiday and could therefore arrange to get married without loss of pay.

A special licence is issued in grave or exceptional circumstances allowing the marriage to take place anywhere and at any time. This is obtained from the Archbishop of Canterbury's office.

Banns of Marriage between William Brown & Mary Stoddale were
 put June 22, 29 July 5 1754 by me John Wilson
 Minister of the Parish of Sutton and Diocese of
 No. 23 York and the said Mary Stoddale of the
 Parish of Burnstople and Diocese of Exeter were
 Married in this Church by Banns with Certificate
 this Twenty seventh Day of July in the Year One Thousand Seven
 Hundred and Eighty eight by me John Wilson Minister
 This Marriage was solemnized between Us John Brown & his mark
 In the Presence of Edward Priest Mary Stoddale & her mark
 Robt. May

Burnsall Marriage Register post 1754

Marriages after 1754 had to be written into a pre-printed and numbered register but there was no universal format. This register shows the dates of calling banns – presumably there was a second book for marriages by licence. However it shows neither the marital status of either party nor any occupations. It does scrupulously show that the legal requirements had been met. Where one party was from a different district, it says "by banns and certificate" indicating that the banns had been called in the second parish. Reproduced by kind permission of the North Yorkshire County Record Office.

There were only three differences that the 1837 introduction of civil registration made to the established church. Firstly, two identical registers had to be kept. One of those stays with the church authorities when complete, who may choose to keep it in the diocesan repository, or in the county record office, or in the church safe and the other must be deposited with the superintendent registrar when complete. Secondly, an exact copy of each marriage entry registered in the church has to be given to the Superintendent Registrar at the end of each quarter for submission to the Office for National Statistics. Thirdly, it is possible to be married in the Church of England by superintendent registrar's certificate if the necessity arises (see page 39).

For some reason, in the early days of civil registration, marriage by Superintendent Registrar's certificate in the Church of England was quite prevalent in some areas, e.g. Manchester and Salford, but generally it is not commonly found.

The introduction of the second identical register and the need to send a copy of each entry of marriage to the superintendent registrar each quarter was the death knell of the Bishop's Transcripts. Some clergy did return them faithfully for many years, but generally the practice died out quite quickly.

Marriage of Quakers and Jews from 1754

Quakers and Jews were the two groups exempted from the law that all marriages must take place in the parish church or chapel. The reasons for the exception of Quakers and Jews were twofold. Firstly neither group was baptised in the Christian faith (which was a pre-requisite in theory for marriage in the Church of England). Quakers did not baptise because it was against their central belief that each man can speak directly to God without an intermediary, and the Jews obviously did not baptise. Secondly, both groups did not believe that a specific building was necessary for the practice of their religion and services could take place anywhere if need be. A further factor in the decision to exempt these two groups from the main provisions of Hardwicke's Marriage Act was undoubtedly the exemplary record keeping, thorough investigation by their societies into the marital status of the bride and groom, their relationship (if any) to one another and reasons for marriage. Quaker marriages at this date show *everyone* who was present at the marriage (often divided into his and hers, and distinguishing between relatives and friends) and much more detail into the investigation of the couple can be found in the Monthly Meeting Minutes.

While most marriages did in fact take place in a Synagogue or Meeting House they did not have to, and it was perfectly possible for the marriage to take place in a private house or other building of their choice. A Synagogue does not have to be a specific building – it is only where four male Jews meet. Orthodox Jews often married out of doors and many synagogues are described on notices of marriages and in the registers as a congregation rather than a building. The marriage of Quakers was registered by the Registering Officer (or pre-1837 equivalent) for the Monthly Meeting in which the marriage took place. The marriage of Jews was registered by the Secretary of the Synagogue of the groom. Because of the structure of their organisations both Quakers and Jews were exempt from the usual requirements of getting married in the area in which they lived (see my marriage certificate, page 10), and the marriages may be registered a long way from the address of either party.

The only major difference that the introduction of civil registration made to these two groups was the necessity for a notice (or notices) to be given to the superintendent registrar of the district(s) in which the couple lived.

Post 1837 – the introduction of civil registration

Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1754 solved some of the difficulties surrounding marriage but by the early 19th century there was a need for further amendment and adaption of the marriage laws for a number of reasons.

One reason was the increasing discontent of the remaining non-conformist churches who were still legally obliged to marry in the established church and who made increasingly vociferous demands to be allowed to perform their own ceremonies in their own churches. This was no doubt aided by the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832 which redrew the constituency boundaries and brought large numbers of non-conformist MPs into the House of Commons from the northern industrial towns for the first time.

Another factor for change was the increasing inability of the parochial system to cope with the rapidly growing populations. Manchester Cathedral in the 1830s was performing multiple marriages with as many as 100 couples at a time being married in one ceremony. There are contemporary accounts of the couples all being lined up, with the parish clerk and vicar trying to ensure they had the right names for the right couples. It is amazing that any correct registrations were made at all! Yet another factor was the enormous difficulties of tracing individual marriages, baptisms and deaths which might be

necessary to resolve inheritance issues. The Times constantly carried advertisements by solicitors offering rewards if anyone could furnish them with a specific marriage certificate or record of baptism. In 1800 these rewards were in the region of £5 which was a huge sum to most people and indicates the difficulty and frustration of trying to trace any one particular event.

At the same time as concern was growing over marriages, the government also wanted better statistics on births and deaths. The end result was an Act of Parliament passed in 1836 and implemented in 1837 which established the General Register Office and civil registration.

The original bill of 1836 which would have made ALL marriages civil was amended by the Lords so that the right of the Church of England to continue to conduct its own marriages was restored. Given that all Bishops were automatically entitled to a seat in the House of Lords I suppose this was hardly surprising!

The bill itself (which should have been brought into force on 1st April 1837) was not implemented for three months until 1st July 1837 because the creation of the Poor Law Unions was not complete. It is difficult for us – with our multiple layers of administrative organisations, many of them covering vast areas such as the whole of North Yorkshire – to imagine a world where a unit of administration bigger than a parish did not exist but such was the composition of England and Wales in the 1830s. The parish unit was too small for civil registration purposes, as it was for the administration of poor relief, and steps were already underway to merge several parishes into a Poor Law Union. Civil registration had to wait for the completion of the Poor Law Unions, and the first superintendent registrars of civil registration were the superintendents of the Poor Law Unions.

The marriage laws created in 1837 have not fundamentally changed until the present day when sweeping changes were introduced in 1995 with further fundamental changes still in the pipeline.

In 1837 there were therefore five types of marriage:

- 1 In the established church.
- 2 By Quaker ceremony.
- 3 By Jewish ceremony.

(Printed by authority of the Registrar General)

CERTIFIED COPY of an
Pursuant to the



ENTRY OF MARRIAGE
Marriage Act 1949

TF 833421

M. Cert.
S.R./R.D. & M.

Registration District		in the		County of		in the	
District of Amersham		Amersham		Buckingham		Buckingham	
No.	When married	Name and surname	Age	Condition	Rank or profession	Father's name and surname	Rank or profession of father
12	Tenth day of July 1966	John Alec Dixon	24	Bachelor	Research Student (Geology)	2a, Pembroke Leicester	Male Attendant
		Barbara Dodd Bishop	20	Spinster	Under Graduate	20 Globe St Leicester	Teacher

Married in the Friends Meeting House Slough according to the usages of the Society of Friends by Certificate by me,

This marriage was solemnized between us
John Alec Dixon
Barbara Dodd Bishop

in the presence of
Nora E. Bishop
Gladys M. Dixon

by S. G. Lawson
Registering Officer

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody.

Register
Dixon Superintendent Registrar

Date 21 January 2000

CAUTION—It is an offence to falsify a certificate or to make or knowingly use a false certificate
tending it to be accepted as genuine to the prejudice of any person or to procure a certificate
knowing it to be false and to procure a certificate
knowing it to be false and to procure a certificate

WARNING: THIS CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF THE IDENTITY OF THE PERSON PRESENTING IT

Marriage of John Alec Dixon and Barbara Dodd Bishop

This is my own marriage certificate and is unusual in that our addresses were in Leicester where we were both at University, and we married in Slough which should have come under the registration district of Eton but is, in fact, registered in South Bucks (now Chiltern Hills). This is because we had a Quaker marriage and the marriage was registered by the Registering Officer for the Jordans Monthly Meeting which comes under South Bucks — but it is worth remembering that it is always possible to have a non-conformist marriage in the family and that oddities like this one can occur!

These three forms of marriage continued as they had before 1837 with only the small differences already noted. In addition there were added:

- 4 In a Register Office.
- 5 In a non-conformist church.

Marriage in a Register Office (1st July 1837 to 31st December 1994)

Marriage could now be entirely civil with notice given to the Superintendent Registrar(s) of the district(s) in which the parties lived, followed by marriage in the district of one of the parties to the marriage. There is still the dual system of marriage by superintendent registrar's certificate or superintendent registrar's licence. (These are technically marriage by superintendent registrar's certificate *without* licence or superintendent registrar's certificate *and* licence but I have shortened that to simply certificate or licence as I feel it is less confusing.)

Marriage by certificate requires one week's residence in the district(s) followed by three weeks in which the notice is displayed (for any legal objections to the marriage to be made). You will see that this is a straight adaptation of the requirements for marriage in the established church.

Marriage by licence needs 15 days residence by one party in their district followed by the issue of the licence for the marriage after one clear day – the marriage to take place in that district; for exceptions, see page 32. (The licence could not be issued for seven days from 1837 to 1856.) From 1856, Saturdays were a working day but Sundays, Christmas Day and Good Friday were not. In 1998 all days were included in the category of a working day.

Marriage in a Register Office from 1995

The rules concerning the requirement to get married in the district of one of the parties was relaxed from 1st January 1995. From that date it was possible for a couple to get married in any Register Office in England and Wales. Notice must still be given to the superintendent registrar of their district(s) but the couple may marry in any Register Office they choose.

Marriage in a non-conformist church from 1837 to the present

Marriages may take place in a non-conformist church that has been registered for marriages, in which case all the preliminaries will take place as

described above for civil marriage but the actual marriage would be in a church. From 1837 to 1898, the ceremony was conducted by a minister of the church after the proper civil preliminaries and the marriage was registered by an attending civil registrar. In other words, the marriage can be found in the register office marriage registers, not in a church register. After 1898 the non-conformist churches were allowed to have their own nominees called Authorised Persons responsible for the register and registration, and their own marriage registers. Some churches took advantage of this, but for many it was not worth trying to meet all the requirements of storage of registers and training of registrars for the very rare marriages that might take place. Most churches these days keep their own registers but there are still some doing so few marriages that they still require a civil registrar to attend for the registration of the marriage which will be recorded in the register office register.

Three further forms of marriage have been added in the 20th century – all of them relatively recently.

Marriage of the housebound or detained

The sixth type of marriage is reserved for the housebound or detained – i.e. someone unable or not allowed to leave their place of residence. If someone is too ill to be moved or is in prison and cannot be allowed to go to a register office for a marriage, then it is possible, after the proper civil preliminaries and various other extra ones too (such as evidence from a doctor about the health of the housebound, or a letter giving permission from the prison governor) for the marriage to take place at a private home or in an institution or prison.

Notice can only be by certificate and the same rules apply about giving notice in the district(s) of residence of the parties to the marriage. If necessary, the registrar will attend at the place of residence to take the notice of marriage. With the exception of Church of England marriages, the registrar has to attend at all marriages of the housebound or detained. Although the period of notice for marriages has been extended to 12 months for all other marriages, those of the housebound or detained must still take place within three months of the notice.

A nice anomaly here is that Quakers and Jews cannot apply for the marriage of the housebound or the detained since they may get married in a private house or a hospital or prison if they choose to anyway!

Marriage by Registrar General's Licence

This is reserved for the dying when the marriage may take place immediately in any building at any time of the day or night once permission from the General Register Office has been obtained and a notice given.

Marriage in a registered building.

From 1st April 1995 it has been possible to have a civil marriage in a building other than a register office. A considerable number of places as diverse as the stately home Cliveden, the entertainment suite of Newcastle Football Club, part of Crewe railway station and the Brighton Pavilion have been registered for civil marriage, along with numerous hotels and country clubs. In this case, notice is given to the superintendent registrar of the district(s) of the parties, but the marriage may be in any of the registered buildings in England and Wales. The superintendent registrar and the registrar from the district in which the building is situated will conduct and register the marriage which is thus recorded in the local register office registers. This means that a marriage may take place hundreds of miles away from the home(s) of the couple.

Whilst the place of marriage has been widened to include a large number of other secular buildings it is still not possible for people other than Quakers and Jews to get married in any building they choose (only registered ones), and they certainly cannot get married outside in a park, while skydiving, doing sub-aqua, or on a football ground. Only permanent and registered buildings are permitted.

There are a number of sweeping changes in connection with the preliminaries to marriage in the pipeline but these are some way yet from being incorporated as law.



**CERTIFIED COPY of an
Pursuant to the
ENTRY OF MARRIAGE
Marriage Act 1949**

TF259465

M. Cert.
S.R./R.B.D. & M.

1899... Marriage solemnized at 7 Mount Pleasant District of Westwich		Registration District Westwich.		in the	
No.	When married	Name and surname	Age	Condition	Rank or profession
46	Twenty eight May 1899	Simon Knoll	28	Tailor's Preser	Bachelor
		Esther Freedman	27	Cap making	Widow
Married in the at 7 Mount Pleasant according to the Usages of the Jews					
This marriage was solemnized between		Simon Knoll his x mark Esther Freedman her x mark		in the presence of us,	
		Betty Peters		J Carter	
		A Fleck		A Jette Sec.	
		7 Mount Pleasant Freedman		Desesed.	
		7 Mount Pleasant Hraham		Desesed.	
		Joseph Knoll		Business	
		Desesed.		Desesed.	
		by Certificate		Desesed.	
		A Jette Sec.			

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody, Re Clerk

Superintendent Registrar

Date

25 January 2000

CAUTION—Any person who (1) falsifies any of the particulars on this certificate, or
(2) uses a falsified certificate as true, knowing it to be false, is liable to prosecution.
WARNING: THIS CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF THE IDENTITY OF THE PERSON PRESENTING IT.

Marriage of Simon Knoll and Esther Freedman

Note the home address for the place of marriage. This is only found in marriages by Jewish or Quaker ceremonies (plus deathbed marriages more recently). Even today with the increase of possible venues for marriages, no other couple can marry at a private address. The bride and groom are apparently living at the same address. Esther is a widow but has the same surname as her father – which is correct because Esther's first marriage was to her cousin (compare this with the marriage of Mary Warrick and John Bishop, page 30). The marriage has been registered by the secretary for the groom's synagogue. Note a common problem in the last column where one father has simply been given as deceased. If there are errors of spelling in the original registration, then these must be copied onto any certificates issued – as indicated by the statement at the bottom of the certificate "Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody". Reproduced by kind permission of Sandra Leventon.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR POST-1837 MARRIAGE CERTIFICATES

Finding your certificate – the Indexes at the General Register Office

Before looking at the information shown on the certificate, it might be advisable to look at the way in which the marriage indexes at the General Register Office are compiled. At the end of each quarter of the year, the registrar must request a copy of every marriage registered by the various churches and chapels and other religious buildings within the district. These were originally always written out onto a quarterly copy sheet. Later on photocopies of the original register were sent and these days computer print-outs might be used.

Each district then had the quarterly copies from the churches and buildings assembled in the same order – along with the quarterly copies of marriages within the register office itself – and these were then bound into books. The order in which the copies were assembled and the districts arranged was the same each quarter. If you order quite a few marriage certificates from the same district you will notice that the reference is remarkably consistent.

The marriage should be indexed twice – under the bridegroom's surname and under the bride's. As they carry the same reference in the indexes, if you know both the surnames at marriage this can be a useful crosscheck. If you are looking for the marriage of people with unusual names, then the first one you come across is probably the one you want. For example, I have a Thomas Dowdell marrying a Mercy Boorer and both those surnames are very unusual. The chances of two Thomas Dowdells marrying two Mercy Boorers is pretty remote. However, the marriage I was looking for between John Rothwell and Ellen Hurst was much more problematical. Both names are pretty common and even the same reference number is not a clinching factor. The reference refers to a complete page of a marriage register – and each page has two marriages recorded on it, so there are two grooms and two brides with the same marriage reference. It is quite possible that the apparently crosschecked reference you have will refer to the groom of the first marriage and the bride of the second and will not therefore be the marriage you are looking for at all!

The indexes to the registers must be used with considerable caution. Remember that they are compiled from secondhand information – the quarterly copies. It is quite possible that entries could be missed, that the clergy did not send in the proper returns, that the indexers misread the names on the quarterly copies, that mistakes were made when the copies were made – the problems are endless. So it is quite possible that a marriage might be missed totally, or the names entered incorrectly, or only one of them entered. My husband and I searched for many years for the marriage of a William Meadows to a Maria Hibbs (or Ibbs). This should have been in Stoke on Trent or Liverpool but we could not find it. There were no marriages of a Maria Hibbs (or Ibbs or Ebbs or any of half a dozen other spellings we tried). There were plenty of marriages for a William Meadows including one in Stoke on Trent at the right time but no cross reference to Maria. We were pretty certain that William and Maria would have married as he was a teacher in a Church of England school and it was difficult to imagine that he would have been appointed if his home life did not conform. In the end we applied for the marriage that took place in Stoke on Trent and sure enough it was to Maria Ibbs. He is in the indexes, she isn't (see page 18).

So not finding a marriage in the indexes, or not finding both parties doesn't necessarily mean that there is not a marriage to be found. On the other hand, there were plenty of people who lived together as man and wife without the benefit of a marriage ceremony so you must be prepared for the fact that a couple might not have married. Before the middle of this century, divorce for ordinary people was prohibitively expensive – not to mention a social disgrace. Those whose first marriage failed had no option but to lie and have a bigamous marriage, or to live together as husband and wife and wait for the first husband or wife to die thus releasing the other to remarry. If you cannot find a marriage before the first child was born, try looking for many years afterwards. You just might find it.

You must also be very flexible in your approach to surnames. They can be misread. They might have a variety of different spellings – including starting with a different first letter. Maria Ibbs was a classic – in Stoke on Trent the name is spelt Ibbs. In Lancashire it is spelt Hibbs. Orrix and Horrix are another example of variations in the spelling in different counties. Even the letters T and S can be muddled. In some registers these two letters can look remarkably alike as can F and T or I and J or U and V and W. My husband's surname of Dixon has only been Dixon since about 1839. Before that

Dickson was usually used and one of his side branches used Dickson in the 1880s long after the rest of the family was consistently using Dixon. In the indexes these two surnames are many pages apart.

If you request a copy of a marriage entry from the General Register Office you will receive a marriage certificate which is a copy of the quarterly copy (put another way, this is thirdhand information). This copy might be handwritten, it might be a photocopy of the original quarterly copy or it might be typewritten or even computer printed. Nevertheless, for the reasons about to be given, an application to the General Register Office quoting their reference is more likely to be successful than an application to the local office.

If you request a copy from the local office then again it may be handwritten, or typed or a photocopy of the original or computer printed. However, the information will have been taken directly from the original register so it is only secondhand information. On the other hand, the reference found in the indexes to the General Register Office are useless to the local registrar. If you find a marriage reference that looks like yours and you apply to the local register office for the copy this is what happens. The registrar has to look at every marriage index to every marriage book that has marriages for the year and quarter quoted until he finds the correct marriage. Very few of the local offices have their marriages computer-indexed right back – time, money and computer capacity do not permit most of them to put all the marriages onto an index. In some of the bigger register offices – or in small local offices that have dozens of parishes within their large rural areas – that may mean looking at over 100 indexes before the correct one is found. Equally, the local registrar may not have the marriage at all. At the time of the event, the district named in the index reference covered the particular church required. But every change to the local authority boundary causes marriage registers to be moved from one district to another.

Yet another problem for the local superintendent registrar is that it is perfectly possible that the register office does not have the register because it has not yet been completed by the church. Each church keeps two sets of registers. Only when the register is completely full is it deposited with the local superintendent registrar. There are some small churches or chapels whose original 500 entry register is not yet full – and therefore still not deposited with the local office. So it is quite possible that the local registrar cannot find this marriage even though his district is quoted in the General



**CERTIFIED COPY of an
Marriage Act 1949
Pursuant to the**

TF 692427

M. Cert.
S.R./R.B.D. & M.

Registration District				Stoke-on-Trent				
1841. Marriage solemnized at St. Peter's Church in the parish of Stoke-upon-Trent				in the County of Stafford				
Column No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	When married	Name and surname	Age	Condition	Rank or profession	Residence at the time of marriage	Father's name and surname	Rank or profession of father
206	July 28	William Meadows	of full age	Bachelor	School master	Hanley	James Meadows	Labourer
1		Maria Ibbs	of full age	Spinster	—	Hanley	Samuel Ibbs	Presser

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by after Banns by me,

This marriage was solemnized between us,

William Meadows
Maria Ibbs's X mark

in the presence of us,

William Robert Caton
Sarah Sanders's X mark

H. M. Venables
25th January 2000

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody, ^{Register} Superintendent Registrar

CAUTION.—It is an offence to falsify a certificate or to make or knowingly use a false certificate or a copy of a false certificate intending it to be accepted as genuine to the prejudice of any person or to procure a certificate knowing it to be false without lawful authority.

WARNING: THIS CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF THE IDENTITY OF THE PERSON PRESENTING IT

Marriage of William Meadows and Maria Ibbs

William and Maria were the great grandparents of my husband John Dixon. This is a photocopy of the quarterly copy which is a handwritten copy of the original register – so secondhand information. Although the names of the bride and groom are quite clear on this certificate – and the indexes would have been working from the same quarterly copy that is reproduced on this certificate – Maria Ibbs was not indexed in the September quarter 1841 of the GRO indexes. Note the unhelpful “of full age” which means anything from 21 upwards and the lack of an occupation for Maria although she was almost certainly working as a dressmaker. They were married by banns (this is not always completed on Church of England weddings). We do not know who the two witnesses were, although William Caton may have been a church official while Sarah could have been a sister of the bride or groom.

Register Office index. It is small wonder then that the local office may return your request for a marriage certificate sent with a General Register Office reference to you and state that it cannot be issued unless you can quote the precise place of marriage.

Heading

Now let's look at what you will actually find on your marriage certificates. Marriage certificates as family historians know them have only been issued since the introduction of civil registration in 1837 so obviously this information relates only to those issued from registers after 1st July 1837. I have not covered the information which can be found in the marriage registers for the various churches before 1837.

The first heading is for the registration district and this is the name you will find in the indexes at The Family Record Centre at Myddleton Place (many of you will still think of these as being the indexes to St Catherine's) or on microfiche copies of the indexes. Registration districts were not split into subdistricts for the purposes of marriage and a rural district could be extremely large – even in the past some registration districts could cover an enormous area. The point you have to remember is that the name of the registration district need not coincide with the name(s) of the town or village that the couple were living in, and indeed the name of the registration district could even be from an adjoining county.

The next heading reads (with slight variations over the years) "Marriage solemnized at ...(1)... in the District of ...(2)... in the County of ...(3).... Or "Marriage solemnized at ...(4)... in the Parish of ...(5)... in the County of ...(3)..." (Church of England marriages only).

- 1 This could read something such as The Register Office or The Baptist Church, High Street or a private address (rare).
- 2 This will be a repeat of the registration district name given in the heading above.
- 3 This will be Surrey or York or whatever.
- 4 This will say The Parish Church or Church of St Matthews or similar.
- 5 This will be the parish name such as St Matthews or Upton-cum-Chalvey.

In the early days of registration there are quite a few variations on this theme!

The heading needs to be checked with the line immediately below the box containing the details of the bride and groom (known as the attestation). This line under the box might have seven possible variations.

- 1 “Married in the parish church (or the name of a church or chapel such as St Johns) according to the rites and ceremonies of the Established Church (or the Church of England or the Church in Wales)” or some similar wording. It is obvious where this marriage has taken place!
- 2 All other non-conformist churches or other religious groups (except Quakers and Jews) “Married in the ... according to the rites and ceremonies of ...”. Normally the denomination of the group shown in the top heading will be the same as that shown at the bottom but it does not have to be. You could get an entry which reads “Marriage solemnized at the Baptist Church, Queen Street” at the top and “according to the rites and ceremonies of the Seventh Day Adventists” underneath. Provided that the religious building is registered for marriages, any denomination may hold a marriage there after the proper legal preliminaries and with a registrar or authorised person present. (An authorised person is the nominated person from the church who registers the marriage in the church register.) Small religious denominations without their own registered building or with a building too small for a marriage might use another church for a marriage. So the top heading tells you where the marriage took place and the bottom one tells you which denomination one or both of the couple were.
- 3 You can get rarities such as “Marriage solemnized at the ...” at the top as in 2 above where the building is obviously a church but without the “according to the rites and ceremonies of ...” bit underneath. That would happen if the minister failed to show up at the wedding. In that situation, if it is not possible to arrange for the attendance of some other minister and the parties wish to proceed with the marriage although there is no person available to conduct the pre-arranged religious ceremony, the registrar may allow the marriage to proceed in such form (other than the rites of the Church of England or the Church in Wales) as the parties request, provided the words prescribed by the statute are included. In such circumstances, the ceremony must contain a religious element, eg. prayers, readings from the Bible, Koran and hymns etc. NB. If a religious service was not used at a building registered for religious worship and marriage, then there would be a fundamental breach of marriage law and the marriage would have to be stopped.

- 4 “Married at 4 The Avenue” at the top and “according to the usages of the Jews (or Quakers)” at the bottom tells you that you have a marriage at a private address and the couple were either Jewish or Quaker. If you have a private address it is important to look at the bottom of the certificate to check what else is shown there as there are two other circumstances under which a private address could appear at the top).
- 5 “Married in the Register Office ...” There will be no further qualification to this and it will appear at the top and the bottom.
- 6 “Married at St Thomas Hospital” (or a private address) at the top and “according to the rites and ceremonies of ... (or with a repeat of the address)” at the bottom together with the ceremony being conducted by Registrar General’s licence means it was deathbed marriage.
- 7 “Married at ... (private address) together with “according to the rites and ceremonies of ...” or a repeat of the address but without any mention of the Registrar General, Quakers or Jews means a marriage of people actually taking place in the prison or mental institution where one of them is detained or in the private home of a housebound person.

Entry Number

The first unnumbered column on the certificate is simply the entry number in the book. It can be any number between 1 and 500. These days, churches or buildings registered for marriages have a book that is commensurate with the number of marriages performed – so a small church that only does one marriage in a blue moon will have a marriage book of only 20 entries while the marriage register for a popular church in a large parish or catchment had as many as 500 entries. The church (or building) will have two identical registers, and when they are complete one book is deposited with the superintendent registrar for that district and the other is kept by the church authorities and may finish up in the county record office or headquarters for that denomination or in the local church.

The entry number has nothing to do with the General Register Office reference in their indexes.

If you have an old and original certificate you will notice that the columns are not numbered across the top. However, if you acquire a recent copy of a marriage entry then the columns are numbered as given below.

Marriages and Certificates in England and Wales

AA 449766
M. Cert.
S.R.R.E.D.

ENTRY OF MARRIAGE
Pursuant to the
Marriage Act 1949
(Notified by the authority of the Register General.)



CERTIFIED COPY of an
Entry of Marriage
Pursuant to the
Marriage Act 1949

Registration District SKipton

1842 Marriage solemnized within the Parish of St Peter in the County of York

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
167	<u>25th 1842</u>	<u>Joseph Edward Calvert</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>Bachelor</u>	<u>Ironmaster</u>	<u>St Peter</u>	<u>Robert Twiss</u>	<u>Ironmaster</u>
		<u>Ellen Jay</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>Spinster</u>	<u>Spinster</u>	<u>St Peter</u>	<u>Thomas Jay</u>	<u>Weaver</u>

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England by Samuel
 This Marriage was solemnized between us, Joseph Edward Calvert in the Presence of us, Margaret Graham
Ellen Jay Walter Watson

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody. E. L. Roberts Deputy Superintendent Registrar 25.4.2000 Date

Marriage of Joseph Calvert and Ellen Jay

Joseph and Ellen were my great great grandparents. This time both the ages are properly given – and are accurate too! The date in the first column is also completed. You will notice that other early certificates do not give the year in the first column, it has to be taken from the date given on the top left-hand side of the certificate. Joseph Edward Calvert was illegitimate, but on this occasion has stated the name of his father as he is allowed to. This is a real bonus on a marriage certificate, as the only other hope of finding the name of a father of an illegitimate child would be to find orders for payment such as bastardy bonds. Margaret Graham was the much older (by 20 years) half-sister of Ellen Jay. I do not know who Walter Watson was.

Column 1 – Date of Marriage

Of birth, death and marriage registrations, the marriage entry is the only record that is usually completed at the time of the event (although some Jewish marriages may be entered at a later date) and there is no separate date for the registration as there is for births and deaths. The date of marriage should be recorded in the form “Twentyseventh August 1899” but the early records are written in many different forms such as 7th August 1876 or May 9 1900 or November the thirteenth 1854 or often without the year as this was shown at the top of the certificate.

There is no time given for the marriage, but marriage was only legal between the hours of 8am and 12 noon at the start of registration and from 8am to 3pm until fairly recently. It is still only legal between 8am and 6pm except for deathbed marriages. Those of you who saw the film “Far from the Madding Crowd” will remember poor Fanny standing at the altar of the wrong church and realising just before 12 noon she was in the wrong place and too late to get to the correct one. The marriage may be registered after the given hours provided the marriage ceremony has been completed within them. All days of the year including Sundays, Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Bank holidays are valid for the solemnisation of marriage. It is more dependent on whether those solemnising the marriage are willing to do the marriage on these days. The superintendent registrar of a district is not required to work on these days and so may refuse to conduct marriages if he or she chooses.

If you look at the date of my own marriage and use a calendar, you will realise that my marriage took place on a Sunday. This was because those concerned were quite willing to conduct and register my marriage. In the early days of marriage registration, what we think of as being special days now were just not celebrated in the same way then, and many marriages took place on Christmas Day or Sundays.

Column 2 – Names of Bride and Groom

Column 2 is for the name and surname of the bride and groom *at the time of the marriage*. Those last six words are crucial – the name used at the date of marriage is not necessarily the one on the birth certificate of the bride or groom. These days the words “Name changed by Deed Poll” or “formerly known as ...” or “otherwise” indicate that the bride or groom has changed their name since birth or their last marriage, but that is a fairly recent

phenomenon. In the past, the bride or groom were simply asked for the names they were known by. Remember that it was not necessary to produce any proof of the use of a name.

It is important to understand why Column 2 shows the name used or acquired by the date of the marriage rather than the one shown on the birth certificate or, for a woman, the last marriage. The whole purpose of displaying banns or notices of marriage is to enable the general public to be aware of forthcoming marriages and make legal objections if necessary. If someone, therefore, is known as Harry Dodd (perhaps the name of his stepfather) it is important that he should be married in that name because maybe no-one would recognise who he was if he had to give the name of Harry Barnett as shown on his birth certificate.

This can be very frustrating for family historians who by this stage do not care so much about the validity of the marriage but do want to know what name someone was born with. It can be especially difficult if for some reason a child is brought up by a totally unrelated family – perhaps a neighbour – and uses their surname, since there will be no obvious connection between the two names.

Names were changed in all sorts of ways. One of the most common would be the use of a stepfather's surname. Or the bride or groom might be known by their true father's surname, but are registered in mother's maiden name or previous married name because she was not married to their real father at the time of the birth. Some people change their names totally because they wish to hide their original identity for whatever reason. Remember that a woman who had been married might revert back to the maiden name before a second marriage, or she might have lived with someone and been using his name before marrying him, or indeed another man.

First names might also be changed. A child might be named Albert Henry on his birth certificate but for some reason always known as James, and he might marry as James rather than Albert Henry.

In theory it should be possible to use the column showing father's name and surname as a guide to the original surname, but father's details too are not always accurate – nor indeed does he have to be shown on a marriage certificate even when he was named on the birth certificate (see page 33).

Column 3 – Age at the Date of Marriage

The next column shows the age at the date of marriage. There are all sorts of problems here. First of all the information is only as accurate as the bride or groom cared to make it – remember that unless the bride or groom appeared to be under the age of consent they were not asked for proof of their age or identity.

There are many instances when the age was “massaged” to make it a little more palatable! Brides who were older than their grooms often “lost” a few years while grooms who were younger “acquired” a few. Some men might have added a few years in the past to get into the army or other job. Some people genuinely would not know how old they were.

Unfortunately some marriage registers simply state “of full age” which tells you nothing except that the bride or groom was over the age of consent to their own marriage. As this could be anything from 21 to 80+ it is less than helpful. It was always possible for a bride or groom under the age of 21 to add a few years if s/he thought they could get away with it, and thus avoid the requirement for the consent of parents. Technically “of full age” could still be written on the notice and in the register.

The age at which people could marry was originally fixed at 12 for girls and 14 for boys and stayed at that until surprisingly late – 1929 (Age of Marriage Act 1929)– when it was amended to 16 for both parties. Parental consent had to be obtained if either party was under 21 (or 18 when the age of consent was lowered to 18).

In the past, at the age of 21 a man or woman was considered old enough to give their own consent to their own marriage. Under that age, the consent of the parent(s) or the legal guardians or the court was required. Parents of people under that age of consent were notified separately that a notice of marriage for their child had been taken – giving them time to object to the marriage should they wish to do so. If one or both parents objected to the marriage and stated so (no reasons need be given) then the marriage could not take place until the bride or groom reached the age of their own consent or the parents withdrew the objection.

D 854672

CERTIFIED COPY of an
ENTRY OF MARRIAGE.
Pursuant to the Marriage
Acts, 1811 to 1934.

(Printed by Authority of the Registrar-General.)
M. Cert.
R.M.

Insert in this
margin any
alterations
which may
appear in the
original entry.

1937. Marriage Solemnized at District of BARTON.		Registration District BARTON.		in the County of LANCASTER.		in the County of LANCASTER.	
No. 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
When Married. 28 January 1937.	Names and Surnames. William Longworth Muriel Beatrice Kent	Age. 34 36	Condition. Single Spinster	Rank or Profession. Clerk Teacher	Residence at the Date of Marriage. 235, Buxton Road Pendlebury	Father's Name and Residence. William Longworth Cotton Mills Manchester	Rank or Profession of Father. Retired Manager
Married in the Presence of W. Longworth M. B. Kent Registrar of Marriages				according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England			
This Marriage was solemnized between us, now legally in my custody, W. Longworth M. B. Kent Registrar of Marriages				in the Presence of us, A. C. Yorke B. M. Kent Registrar of Marriages			



Register of Marriages.

Marriage of William Longworth and Muriel Kent

Note the marital status of William Longworth with all the particulars of his first wife. These days the certificate would simply say "Previous marriage dissolved". This is a perfect certificate - every column filled in according to law! The occupation columns are particularly full, giving very good descriptions of bride, groom and their parents. B.M. Kent was the mother of the bride, and A.C. Yorke was a godfather of the groom. Reproduced by kind permission of Mike Longworth.

The only exception to the requirement for consent was in the case of a second marriage before the age of 21 i.e. if a bride or groom had married once with parental consent and had been widowed before the age of 21 they could marry the second time without parental consent. These days, the same applies to a widow(er) under the present age of consent of 18 years. The reason for this is that the first marriage has taken the party requiring consent out of the family and they are therefore considered adult. I used to think that the logic was that if they had got married once and still wanted to do it again...!

Consent of parents for underage parties is not required if the relevant age will be reached before or on the same day as the certificate or licence for marriage is due.

Marriage before the legal age is invalid and void.

I know of one travelling family who were distraught when their 15 year old son got his girlfriend pregnant. The baby was due well before his 16th birthday and the parents were desperate for the couple to get married as soon as possible. Obviously this could not be done as the age of a couple is carefully checked these days, but in the past I am not so sure it wasn't easier for an underage marriage to be contracted.

Column 4 – Marital Status

This refers to the marital status at the time of the marriage. The most commonly occurring ones in the last century were bachelor/spinster or widow/widower.

You have to remember that it is not possible in this country to prove that someone has not married. It is very easy to prove that someone has been married and also that a marriage has ended in the death of one of the partners or in divorce. There are relevant papers to show these events, but there is nothing which exists to show that someone has not married. If a man or woman states that they have not been married, then they have to be taken to be speaking the truth.

Unfortunately there is, equally, nothing to stop them from lying! And plenty of bigamous marriages to prove that people did.

No matter how old they are, any woman who has not previously been married is entered as a spinster and any man not previously married is a bachelor.

Before 1973, it was also possible for a man or woman to be stated to be a bachelor or spinster when there appears to be a previous marriage for them. If a bride or groom had been married before but that marriage was void or voidable, then they would revert to the marital status previously existing. So someone whose first marriage was void or annulled would be entered as a bachelor or spinster on their second marriage. Since 1973, a bride or groom whose previous marriage was void would be entered as their marital status before the void marriage but would have "previous marriage annulled" if they had previously had a voidable marriage (see page 29 and the certificate on page 26).

The grounds for a void or voidable marriage were laid down in the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973.

A marriage has always been *void* if a legal impediment to the marriage existed i.e. one of the following:

- 1 One of the parties was under the age of consent (see Column 3).
- 2 The parties were within the forbidden degrees of relationship (see below).
- 3 The parties were not respectively male and female.
- 4 There was an existing legal marriage for one of the parties.
- 5 The parties have married with disregard for certain legal requirements as to the formation of the marriage (e.g. they did not give notice of their intention to marry to their local registrar or did not obtain a marriage licence).
- 6 In the case of a polygamous marriage entered into outside England and Wales, that either party was at the time of the marriage domiciled in England or Wales.

The age of consent has changed over the years (see Column 3) and the degrees of forbidden relationship have also changed with time. At present (and in the past) it is forbidden for a man to marry his:

Mother or adopted mother

Grandmother

Daughter or adopted daughter

Niece
Granddaughter
Aunt
Sister

And the equivalent relationships are banned for a woman.

It may now be possible for a couple to marry within the boundaries of step and in-law relationships depending on circumstances but these were forbidden in the past: e.g. it has been legal, since 1908, for a man to marry his deceased wife's sister and since 1921 the equivalent for a woman (good thing Gilbert and Sullivan were not writing their operettas today!) The same restriction on marrying a brother- or sister-in-law where the first marriage had ended in divorce was not removed until the Marriage Enabling Act 1960.

It has always been legal to marry a cousin (although a church may forbid it, the state does not).

Incidentally, where a marriage is void it is assumed in law that the innocent party IS innocent and did not knowingly contract an unlawful marriage.

Before August 1973 a person whose marriage was voidable and had been annulled would also have reverted to their previously existing marital status at their next marriage. Since that date the marital status would be "previous marriage annulled). A *voidable* marriage is one which meets the legal requirements but which the court has subsequently annulled. The following marriages are voidable:

- 1 Where there is an incapacity or wilful refusal to consummate the marriage.
- 2 At the time of the marriage either party was suffering from a mental disorder of such a kind or to such an extent as to be unfitted for marriage.
- 3 Where one of the parties did not validly consent to the marriage whether because of duress, mistake, unsound mind or otherwise.
- 4 Where a bride is pregnant by a man other than the groom and has not told the groom.
- 5 Where either party has a sexually transmitted disease and has not told the other party.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF MARRIAGE

Saturday



Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, LONDON
BISHOP 1876

Application Number 71276

Registration District <u>Shepton</u>		Rank or position <u>Local leader</u>		Residence at the time of marriage <u>Millfields Shepton</u>		Father's name and surname <u>Thomas Bishop deceased</u>		Rank or position of father <u>Mailmaker</u>	
No. <u>147</u>	Date of marriage <u>50 years</u>	Age <u>50</u>	Qualification <u>Widower</u>	Rank or position <u>Local leader</u>	Residence at the time of marriage <u>Millfields Shepton</u>	Father's name and surname <u>Thomas Bishop deceased</u>	Rank or position of father <u>Mailmaker</u>		
Married in the presence of <u>John Bishop</u>		Age <u>40</u>		Qualification <u>Widow</u>	Rank or position <u>House Keeper</u>	Residence at the time of marriage <u>Hill Shepton</u>	Father's name and surname <u>William Warrick</u>	Rank or position of father <u>Factory Operative</u>	
This marriage was solemnized between us, <u>John Bishop</u> and <u>Mary Warrick</u>		Age <u>40</u>		Qualification <u>Widow</u>	Rank or position <u>House Keeper</u>	Residence at the time of marriage <u>Hill Shepton</u>	Father's name and surname <u>William Warrick</u>	Rank or position of father <u>Factory Operative</u>	
In the presence of <u>John Bishop</u> and <u>William Warrick</u>		Age <u>40</u>		Qualification <u>Widow</u>	Rank or position <u>House Keeper</u>	Residence at the time of marriage <u>Hill Shepton</u>	Father's name and surname <u>William Warrick</u>	Rank or position of father <u>Factory Operative</u>	
In the presence of <u>John Bishop</u> and <u>William Warrick</u>		Age <u>40</u>		Qualification <u>Widow</u>	Rank or position <u>House Keeper</u>	Residence at the time of marriage <u>Hill Shepton</u>	Father's name and surname <u>William Warrick</u>	Rank or position of father <u>Factory Operative</u>	

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Marriages in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, LONDON, under the Seal of the said Office, the 11th day of August 1876.

MB 100621



Marriage of John Bishop and Mary Warrick

John and Mary were my great grandparents. Although John and Mary had full addresses with numbers in 1881, this is not shown on the marriage certificate but just Millfields or Primrose Hill. There is an error here because Mary was a widow and her father was not William Warrick but William Rothwell. This is not an error on the certificate, but an error in the register which John and Mary did not pick up. In the earlier records of the Warrick family the name is spelt Warwick I do not know the identity of either of the witnesses. (but see certificate of Simon Knoll and Esther Freedman page 14).

Whereas a void marriage is not and never has been legal, a voidable marriage is legal unless steps are made to annul it and none of these voidable marriages *have* to be annulled. The grounds exist for an annulment if one of the couple wish to end the marriage but they don't *have* to. If both parties to a marriage are quite content with an unconsummated marriage that is their affair. Mentally handicapped people are not barred from marriage if their family/carers feel this is an appropriate step for them (but the family of a wealthy heir(ess) might try to have a marriage annulled on the grounds of mental instability if they felt their emotionally unstable son or daughter had been talked into a marriage by a fortune hunter). A man who discovers he has been conned into marriage by a woman who tells him he is the father of her expected child when he isn't, could petition the court for an annulment, but he may be quite happy with his wife and another man's baby.

In this century increasing numbers of brides and grooms have "previous marriage dissolved" as their marital status (this was shown as "previously the husband/wife of ..." in the early part of this century). In the last century, divorce was immensely expensive as each divorce required an individual Act of Parliament to dissolve it and until the second half of this century was also considered a great scandal. Few couples, then, were divorced. Anyone in a marriage that was effectively finished but could not be dissolved would either have to admit the truth to a new partner and the couple live together as husband and wife without going through any legal ceremony, or had to lie to a new partner and go through a bigamous marriage.

There are hundreds of family historians out there who cannot find the marriage of two of their ancestors. Maybe there isn't one for them. But maybe there is one many, many years after the expected date because there has been a previous marriage for one of them. The first marriage will be there in the indexes but will have been ignored because, of course, the cross-checking name cannot be found. It may be that the second marriage can be found a very long time later when the spouse of the first marriage finally has the decency to die, allowing the ancestors to marry.

Column 5 – Occupation

The next column shows the occupation at the time of the marriage. A line through this column does not necessarily mean that the bride or groom was not in employment, nor does having an occupation shown mean that they were, in fact, employed. In the last century most women did not have an

occupation shown on a marriage certificate, even though a large number of women did, in fact, work. Equally if a bride or groom is temporarily out of work then their usual employment may still be shown.

Sometimes the bride or groom indulges in a little aggrandisement of their occupation but equally they might make less of it.

With one or two exceptions, before 1997 only paid employment was shown and only acceptable occupations too, so you would not find burglar or prostitute. Since 1997 non-gainful occupations such as housewife may be recorded. Landed gentry might have "gentleman" shown or indeed their title instead of an occupation. After all, the column is headed "rank or profession".

Column 6 – Address

The address at the time of the marriage can often be a misleading column. Except for a couple having a Jewish or Quaker marriage for whom totally different rules apply, when a couple wanted to get married one of them had to:

- 1 Live in the parish for a Church of England or Church in Wales wedding.
- 2 Live in the district in which the non-conformist church was situated.
- 3 Live in the registration district of the register office they were marrying in (see also page 11).

But there were two exceptions.

If a couple lived in one parish/district but regularly worshipped at a church in a different parish/district, then they could get married in that church while still living at their real addresses provided that one of them was on the electoral roll for the established church, or could state that the nonconformist church was where they usually worshipped (and the Minister would confirm that was so if approached). It is quite possible for the home address and the church used for regular worship to be some considerable distance apart, e.g. someone might live and work a long way from his parent's address but go home frequently and only go to the church there – that would still make it the usual place of worship.

Or, from 1840, if a couple wanted a marriage in a denomination for which there was no church/building in either of their districts, then the couple could nominate the specific church of the correct denomination where they wished to get married, e.g. the nearest Greek Orthodox church to me is

20 miles away and if I were Greek Orthodox then I would have the right to marry in that church even if I did not regularly worship there.

For a civil marriage in a register office there were no exceptions to the rule that one of the couple had to live in the district of the register office they were marrying in until January 1995 when new marriage laws were brought in.

In general then, the address of either the groom or the bride will be close to the church they are marrying in, but it does not have to be so – the registration district for the church may be many miles away from the bride/groom's address.

However, for a variety of reasons (see page 5), a couple might want to get married in a church or a register office which was not in the district in which they lived, and they did not fall into one of the two exceptions mentioned above. The only way round that was to establish residency (for one or both of them) in the district in which they wanted to get married. All that was necessary was for one or both of them to go and live at an address for seven days in the required registration district, and at the end of the seven days go and give notice of marriage (this information only relates to nonconformist marriages and marriages in the register office). They did not then have to stay at that address until the date of the marriage but could return to their usual address. In other words – having an address on a marriage certificate is not necessarily where the bride and groom usually lived (see the certificate of Joseph Woods page 34).

Column 7 – Name of the Father of the Bride/Groom

The penultimate column on the marriage certificate should show the names of the fathers of the bride or groom.

The man named in this column – with the exception of an adoptive father after 1926 – should be the natural father of the bride or groom. It should *not* be stepfather, godfather, mother's latest lover or anyone else. Unfortunately the name given as being that of the father is not always the natural father.

If a groom or bride does not have his/her father named on their birth certificate that does not stop them being named on a marriage certificate. My illegitimate 2 x great grandfather Joseph Edward Calvert (mother was Mary Calvert) named his father as Robert Twistleton when he – Joseph – married (see certificate

(Printed by authority of the Registrar General)



**CERTIFIED COPY of an
Pursuant to the
ENTRY OF MARRIAGE
Marriage Act 1949**

TF 690295

M. Cert.
S.R./R.E.D. & M.

Registration District <u>Hatfield</u>					in the County of <u>Hertford</u>			in the		
1917 Joseph Woods solemnized at the Parish Church of <u>Northaw</u>					Residence at the time of marriage		Father's name and surname		Rank or profession of father	
Columns	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No.	When married	Name of person	Age	Condition	Rank or profession	Residence at the time of marriage	Father's name and surname	Rank or profession of father		
97	February 17th	Joseph Woods	55	Widower	Inspector of Gas & Water	Springfield Cottage, Northaw	Daniel Woods	Labourer		
	1917	Ruth Bland	37	Spinster	Domestic	15 Cowley Street, Westminster	Joseph Bland	Labourer		
Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church										
This marriage was solemnized between us, <u>Joseph Woods</u> <u>Ruth Bland</u>					in the presence of us, <u>C. S. Aylward</u> <u>R. Aylward</u>		by me, <u>Francis R. Sawley</u> Vicar			

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody.

CAUTION—It is an offence to falsify a certificate or to make or knowingly use a false certificate person or to possess a certificate knowing it to be false without lawful authority.

WARNING: THIS CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF THE IDENTITY OF THE PERSON PRESENTING IT

Signature } F. Sawley
Superintendent Registrar }
Date 26th January 2000

Marriage of Joseph Woods and Ruth Bland

Joseph was my grandfather and this is his second marriage as shown by his marital status. This would again appear to be a straightforward registration, but in fact Joseph was not living at Springfield Cottage in Northaw but in Finchley. This is established fact as there are family alive to confirm that he never moved from his Finchley address. The address is, in fact, that of the Aylwards who were witnesses. Joseph's parents and grandparents lived in Northaw between 1840 and 1880 but Joseph himself was born and brought up in Finchley. I nearly disregarded this as the marriage I was looking for as the registration district was given as Hertford which was not what I was expecting.

page 22). On the other hand my illegitimate great grandfather David Culshaw (mother was Mary Culshaw) named a man also called David Culshaw as his father on his marriage certificate but I am sure this is a figment of David's imagination. There is absolutely no evidence for a father called David Culshaw – he just did not want to see blanks on his marriage certificate or admit that his mother had never married. Given that David lived in a pretty small town where everyone knew everyone's business I am surprised he got away with it!

On the other hand – if a groom or bride does not want his/her father shown on a marriage certificate they do not have to. The Times carried a half page article on the marriage of the popstar Liam Gallagher and the actress Patsy Kensit with a copy of their marriage certificate showing that Liam had refused to have his father's details on the marriage entry. Apparently Liam and his father had not spoken for 20 years. I have also attended a marriage where a bridegroom refused to have his father's details entered. His bride did not know who her father was and had to have blanks drawn though his details, whereupon the bridegroom insisted that if she had to have blanks on the certificate then so would he – which I thoroughly endorsed from an emotional point of view while deploring entirely from the family history point of view!

If the father of a bride or groom has died by the time of the marriage then it should say “deceased” under his name but this is not a very reliable item. If it says “deceased” then father probably was, but the lack of the word deceased does not necessarily mean he was still alive. It depends entirely how rigorous the clergyman/registrars/appointed person was.

Apart from the fact that a bride or groom might not tell (or know) the truth about their own father, mistakes can also be made (see the certificate for John Bishop, page 30). My Bishop ancestors in Skipton seem remarkably prone to misleading marriage entries!

If a woman has been the sole adopter of a child, then she may be entered on the marriage register.

Column 8 – Father's Occupation

The last column is father's occupation. It should say “retired” if a father had reached retirement age but that was not an option for a lot of men in the past! Unfortunately, when it was an option there are plenty of registers

around which simply say retired. Where you are trying to sort out descent with fairly common names, the father's names and occupation can be a considerable help. For example, I have two Thomas Bishops (cousins) born within a few months of one another, getting married in Skipton close to one another, both with fathers called Thomas. The fact that one father was a tailor, while the other was a nailmaker was the only way of sorting the two Thomas' out.

Some fathers had "independent" or equivalent as an occupation and if the family circumstances bear that out, then he probably was. However, do not assume this is correct unless other evidence backs it up. My grandmother gave her father's occupation as "independent" when she married Joseph Woods. As she had been forcibly made to leave home at 12 by her step-mother, and her father was in fact an impoverished hay trusser, I think the only one who was independent (in character if not financially) was herself! She probably wanted something on a level with her groom's father who was a Superintendent of the Waterworks.

The rest of the certificate

Don't neglect to look at the rest of the marriage certificate because it can still tell you something.

Under the main entry are the words "Married in the ...".

For a Church of England or Church in Wales marriage this will say something along the lines of "The Parish Church according to the rites and ceremonies of the Established Church".

For most non-conformist churches it will something like "the Baptist Church (or Chapel) according to the rites and ceremonies of the Baptists or "The Catholic Church according to the rites and ceremonies of the Roman Catholics". It might also repeat the name of the church so will say something like "St Anthony's Church according to the rites and ceremonies of the Roman Catholics".

Quaker marriage certificates say (after the place of marriage) "according to the usages of the Society of Friends" while Jewish certificates would state "according to the usages of the Jews".

However – the rites and ceremonies bit does not have to match the denomination of the church (see page 19). A marriage like this – where one denomination has borrowed the building of another for a marriage, will be registered in the marriage register of the building where it took place – there will not be a marriage register for the actual denomination of the ceremony.

A marriage in a Register Office will simply have “Register Office” written in.

Some of this may be pre-printed as part of the certificate or it may be handwritten.

The last part of the line under the main entry will also vary depending on the date of the certificate and who has issued it. It will say either “by ... by me” or “by ... after ... by me” (established church only).

Filling the gap you might find:

- 1 By certificate.
- 2 By licence.
- 3 After banns.
- 4 By common licence or Bishop’s licence.
- 5 By special licence or Archbishop’s licence.
- 6 By Registrar General’s licence.
- 7 By superintendent registrar’s certificate.

- 1 **By certificate** would be found on a marriage entry in a register office marriage register or in a non-conformist marriage register. It shows that the couple waited 3 weeks between giving notice and getting married.
- 2 **By licence** would be found in the same set of registers and would indicate that the couple may have married with less than three weeks between giving the notice and getting married (with a minimum these days of one clear working day between the notice and the marriage although this was seven days in 1837). However, a licence lasted three months (until 1997) so the marriage wasn’t necessarily done in a rush. It may have been easier to give one licence notice rather than the two required because the couple lived in two different districts.
- 3 **After banns** can only be found on a marriage certificate for the Established Church. It is the equivalent of the certificate for the register office and non-conformist churches.

AA 201298 1846
M. Cert.
S.R./R.B.D.

WARNING: THIS CERTIFICATE IS NOT
VALID UNLESS IT IS
THE PERSON'S OWN COPY

ENTRY OF MARRIAGE
Marriage Act 1949



CERTIFIED COPY of an
Pursuant to the

Registration District **STOKE-ON-TRENT**

1846. Marriage solemnized at Stonestall in the Parish of Stonestall in the County of Stafford.

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
361	August 10	James Meadows	Full	Minister	Labourer	Stonestall	Thomas Meadows	Minister
		Hannah Sheen	Full	Widow		Stonestall	Ralph Piggby	Blacksmith

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England after reading by me,

This Marriage was solemnized between us,
James Meadows in the Presence of us,
Hannah Sheen William Sheen
Hannay Barber

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody.
H. M. Smith, Superintendent Registrar 10. 10. 54 Date

Marriage of James Meadows and Hannah Sheen

James Meadows was the great great grandfather of my husband John Dixon. This is a photocopy of the original register, so there is the bonus of the true signatures of all the parties to the marriage. Not all register offices have the facility to xerox the original onto the certificate form. This was the second marriage of James Meadows – well worth looking for as we have not been able to find his baptism and this late marriage gives us his father's name, allowing us to go back another generation. Again there is the unhelpful "of full age". Both fathers have been given an occupation but neither has been labelled "deceased". As Thomas Meadows must have been at least 85 by then, it is more likely that he is dead than alive!

- 4 By **common licence** is again only for the Established Church. It allows for a marriage in a shorter space of time than that required by banns and has been issued by the church registrar for the diocese of the church – i.e. this is a matter for the Bishop. It is the established church's equivalent of 2.
- 5 By **special licence** is again only found in connection with the Established Church. The licence has been issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury (not a Bishop) and permits a marriage to take place in any church named in the licence (so not necessarily the parish church of one of the couple), and has immediate effect. It could also be used in the circumstances outlined in 6.
- 6 By **Registrar General's licence** could be found on any marriage certificate except that of the Established Church. It is issued when one of the couple is dying and allows a marriage ceremony to take place at any named location at any time of the day or night. The marriage ceremony could be purely civil or for any religious denomination except the Church of England or the Church in Wales when a common or special licence would be issued.
- 7 By **certificate** these days is a very rare finding. It is issued for a Church of England marriage but instead of banns being called in the church(es), notice of marriage has been given to the superintendent registrar. In the early days this would be necessary where services were held so infrequently e.g. in a small chapel, that it was not possible to call the banns on three occasions and get married all within the the three months time limit. Later on it was sometimes used as an expedient if for some reason the vicar did not want to make the forthcoming marriage in the church public knowledge and have the entry in his banns book which anyone can look at. The sort of problem might be where a bride and groom were of different persuasions and the vicar maybe didn't want the congregation in general to know, or even the bride/groom's family if he thought they might try to disrupt the ceremony. It is sometimes used these days when one of the couple is divorced and the vicar does not want it generally known that he is marrying a divorcee in his church.

In the early days of registration this was quite frequently used in some areas for some reason.

Signatures

These should be the signatures of the bride and groom and the witnesses. It is a pity that so many Church of England clergy insist on people writing



CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF MARRIAGE

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE,

Application Number R 018106.

to be signed

1867. Marriage solemnized at <i>St. Andrew's Church</i> in the Parish of <i>St. Andrew's</i> in the County of <i>York</i>	
No. <i>297</i>	When Married <i>24th August 1867</i>
Name and Surname <i>David Culshaw</i>	Age <i>24</i>
<i>Jane Calvert</i>	Age <i>18</i>
Married in the <i>Church</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by us, <i>David Culshaw</i> and <i>Jane Calvert</i>	
The Marriage was solemnized between us, <i>David Culshaw</i> and <i>Jane Calvert</i>	
Rank or Profession, <i>Widower</i>	
Rank or Profession of Father, <i>David Culshaw</i>	
Rank or Profession of Mother, <i>Jane Calvert</i>	

Marriage of David Culshaw and Jane Calvert

David and Jane were my great grandparents. David is given only as of "full age" which means over 21 (he was in fact 23) while Jane has been given her true age as she was a minor and the vicar or curate obviously felt he should be accurate. This would appear to be a straightforward certificate, but in fact David Culshaw was illegitimate and there is no evidence at all that there was a David Culshaw who could be his father. Margaret Calvert was Jane's sister. I do not know who Robert Smith was. Notice the poor handwriting on this certificate which again is a photocopy of the quarterly copy. The place of marriage and residence is Skipton and Jane's marital status is spinster but if you didn't already know that, the place could look like Wipton or Irpton and if Jane's occupation had been a spinster it would have been difficult to decipher. The registrar copying a marriage certificate from a register will have as much of a problem reading the original as you would – so it is quite possible that there will be errors of copying on a certificate.

their full names which, of course, is nothing like giving a signature. If you want to compare signatures to ensure you are looking at the correct bride and groom, or to see if one person has been impersonating another, then a signature is much more useful than simply the full name written out.

Many brides and grooms could not write and the mark shown by a large X will be a familiar sight to most family historians. It should ring alarm bells because it meant that the couple could not check their details for themselves. Worse still are the brides and grooms who could manage a signature but still could not read as then you don't know whether they could check for themselves or not.

More recently it is possible to find the words "the signature of ..." following the signature of a bride or groom. This is used where the bride or groom has signed their name but in another script e.g. arabic. The same alarm bells should ring, although it is possible that the register entry has been checked and confirmed with the party signing in this way by an interpreter.

Unfortunately few brides and grooms are in a state to give careful examination to their marriage entries before they sign! And, of course, if they could not read then it is not going to be possible for them to check for mistakes. Neither John Bishop nor Mary Warwick née Rothwell picked up the incorrect name of Mary's father which should have been William Rothwell not William Warwick (see page 30).

The witnesses should preferably be known personally to the bride or groom. After all, their function is to witness in a court of law what they heard and saw at a marriage ceremony and it might be necessary to contact them at a later stage. Usually the witnesses will have some connection to the bride or groom. They might be relatives – father or mother, or a grandparent maybe, perhaps a favourite uncle or cousin. It is especially useful when one sister uses another as a witness – especially when that one has married. I have tracked several married sisters who had been lost to me simply because they acted as witnesses. Equally, the witnesses might be close friends or work colleagues. However, some people do use witnesses off the street that they do not know from Adam!

It is not necessary for a marriage register to be completed and signed for the marriage to be legal. The marriage is valid in law once the declaration and contract have been verbally made – hence the witnesses. There are no laws

BISHOP 1909

Certified Copy of an Entry of Marriage.

Registration Act 1836 to 1856.

Superintendent Registrar's District of Whipton
Marriage Solemnized at Whipton Baptist Chapel, 10th Oct. Whipton in the County of York
 in the District of Whipton

No.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence in the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
116	Stephen Bishop	31 years	Married	Cotton Weaver	33 St. Michaels Street Whipton	John Bishop Decard	Cotton Weaver
	Ellen Culshaw	25 years	Spinster	Cotton Weaver	4 Court Lane Whipton	David Culshaw Decard	Brickman

Married in the Whipton Baptist Chapel
 This Marriage Solemnized between us
Stephen Bishop
Ellen Culshaw

according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Protestant Baptists by William Judge, Minister
 in the Presence of us, James Barker by Certificate
Daniel Broadbent Minister, Registrar

Witness my Hand this 30th day of October 1909 in the County of York
Minister Registrar

The Statutory Fee payable for an original certified copy of an entry in a Register of Births, Marriages, or Deaths is one shilling and sixpence (for the stamp) but if taken at any time afterwards an additional fee of sixpence is chargeable for a warrant.

Marriage of Stephen Bishop and Ellen Culshaw – my grandparents.

This is the original certificate, issued on the day of marriage which makes it a very nice heirloom. Notice the 1p stamp over which the registrar has written his signature. The Baptist Church at this stage did not keep its own registers because this marriage has been conducted by the Minister and recorded by the Registrar so it will be found in the Register Office registers, not in the Church registers. The witnesses were Ellen's brother-in-law James Barker and her half-sister Annie (a noticeable lack of Bishops here!). Stephen is living with one of his father's half-sisters. At her second marriage the witnesses were another brother-in-law and the daughter of another of her first husband's half-sisters. They keep close kin, in Yorkshire! It is always worth following up witnesses and addresses as they can lead to other members of the family.

concerning the age of marriage witnesses – they need to be old enough to function properly as a witness – that is all.

A marriage must be witnessed by two people but it is perfectly possible to have more than two signing.

The certificate will be completed with the signature(s) of those conducting and registering the marriage. There may be two signatures e.g. all register office marriages have two signatures which are those of the superintendent conducting the ceremony and the registrar who is registering the marriage. Non-conformist marriages will also have two. Church of England marriages would usually only have the one signature of the cleric who has both conducted the ceremony and completed the registration, and Jewish and Quaker certificates will also have only the one signature. The certificate is completed with the date of issue of the certificate – which may be the same date if it is completed on the marriage day or could have a much later date. Note that there is no separate space in the actual marriage register for a date of registration.

The last feature on a marriage certificate should be a line drawn through the space at the end of the certificate but outside the box containing all the details. The line indicates that there have been no corrections made to the original entry. If it is the certificate completed on the day, there should be a line drawn through this space (as there will not have been time for any formal correction to have been made to the original entry). If a correction to the entry is made some time after the date of marriage, then this is where the correct details will be shown.

Miscellaneous

Two marriages on the same day

It was quite legal from 1837 onwards for a couple to have two marriages in two different locations on the same day. In that case the marriage preliminaries had to be gone through twice for the two different ceremonies, and the marital status in each register would be that before either marriage had taken place. In other words, the second marriage that day would not have any reference to the first marriage already gone through that day. Some couples did marry twice on the same day. Maybe they had two different denominations to satisfy. Maybe they had people they particularly wanted to be present who could not manage the journey to a distant place.

Two marriages at different dates

More puzzling are the double marriages where a couple have married once, and then the same couple have married again anything from a few weeks to several years later. This may be because there was something legally not correct with the first marriage e.g. maybe a mistake was made such as insufficient days between giving the notice and getting married. If this was the case, then the first marriage was void and if the problem was picked up at a later date, then maybe the couple will be advised to marry again. Their marital status the second time would be as if they had not gone through the first marriage to one another (see page 27).

It is also legally possible – though not advisable – for the same couple to marry one another again even where they have not been divorced from one another and the first marriage was perfectly legal. In that case, these days, reference would be made to the first marriage (see page 27).

Marriages where one party lives in Scotland or Northern Ireland

It is quite possible for a marriage register to show an address in Scotland or Northern Ireland at the date of marriage. Although both countries have quite separate and different registration systems, arrangements were made for marriages between two people, one living in England or Wales and one living in Scotland or Northern Ireland, to get married in England or Wales without the one in Scotland or Northern Ireland having to come and live in England or Wales first. In that case, each party gives notice as required by the laws of their registration system to their local superintendent registrar (or equivalent). Similarly, a notice of marriage may be given to the local superintendent registrar in England or Wales for a marriage in Scotland or Northern Ireland. This facility was implemented when the relevant country first instituted its own form of civil registration.

What is even more important is that under Scottish law, it was quite possible for a couple both of whom lived in England or Wales to get married in Scotland. Nor did they have to go and establish residency there as arrangements could – unlike England and Wales where notice has to be given in person – be made by post. If you have an ancestor called Hamish MacDonald or Fiona Munro and you can't find their marriage in England or Wales, it might occur to you that they could have got married in Scotland. But if you have a name like Frederick Williams or Mary Simpson it might not be so obvious that maybe they were born in Scotland, or one of them had parents living there.

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This booklet has been prepared to try and help family historians first find and then make the most of the information provided by marriage certificates. It only relates to certificates issued by the registration service in England and Wales. Scotland, Northern Ireland, Southern Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands all have their own registration services which may differ significantly from the details discussed in this booklet.



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